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MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAIROBI FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

PRIORITY THEME: EQUALITY

Elimination of stereotyping in the mass media

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The Commission on the Status of Women, at its thirty-fourth session, selected "Elimination of stereotyping of women in the mass media" as the priority theme under the rubric "Equality" for its fortieth session. The present report discusses changes in the portrayal of women in the media, including the increase in the representation of violence, and considers various measures taken to achieve a more balanced portrayal, building on the recommendations for action contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. The report also discusses recent developments in the communications sector, including challenges set by new technologies. Activities carried out by the United Nations are described. Issues that need further clarification and investigation are defined. A distinction is made between changes that can be brought about through measures taken from within existing media structures and those introduced from the outside.

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INTRODUCTION

1. In the past several decades, the world has witnessed a revolution in the field of communications - electronic, print, visual and audio. Progress has been made in computer technology, satellite and cable television, and global access to information. New opportunities for the participation of women in the communications media and for the dissemination of information about women have been created. Yet, in spite of all these developments, progress in removing stereotyped representations of women in the media has been slow. With this in mind, the Commission on the Status of Women, at its thirty-fourth session, selected "Elimination of stereotyping of women in the mass media" as the priority theme under the rubric "Equality" for its fortieth session.

2. In its early days, the women's movement had at its core a critical attitude towards the mass media, which were held to be deeply implicated in the patterns of discrimination operating against women in society. The critics recognized that the media had the power to change perceptions and attitudes and might be useful instruments in advancing the status of women and fostering equality between men and women. As new means of communication have increased, the media have become some of the most powerful socializing agents in modern society, and their role in either shaping stereotypes or promoting a fair and accurate representation of women is unquestioned. As stated in the Beijing Platform for Action "Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women". 1/

3. Men and women alike are the objects of sex-stereotyping in the media. Women are often represented in archetypal feminine and caring roles or as sex objects. The stereotyped beauty myth attached to them has been most strongly criticized by women who face barriers to their advancement for reasons of race, age, ethnicity and disability. Early critics simply requested the removal of stereotyped portrayals or negative images of women, not taking into account that a value judgement was attached to any critique of so-called negative and positive images. The Beijing Platform for Action reflects new thinking when it states that "Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world". 2/ It asks for a "balanced portrayal of women and girls in their multiple roles" 3/ and encourages the "use of non-stereotyped, balanced and diverse images of women in the media". 4/

4. The stereotyping of women in the media and the media's influence on public opinion about the role of women have received considerable attention in the work of the United Nations for the advancement of women. The United Nations International Decade for Women (1975-1985) was a catalyst for activities in the field of women and media. UNESCO initiated the first international review and research in this area. The Commission on the Status of Women has long shown an interest in women and the media, starting with the period leading to the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City, in 1975. In 1979, a special rapporteur was appointed to undertake a study on the impact of the mass communications media on the changing roles of men and women; the study was later submitted to the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, held at Copenhagen in 1980. 5/ It was acknowledged from the beginning

that certain deep-rooted attitudes based on cultural patterns represented serious obstacles to the advancement of women. Technical advances in the mass communications media made it possible to disseminate those attitudes on a large scale. It was already recognized that important measures for change should include monitoring and regulations by Governments in order to advance the participation of women in the media and reinforce the role of the media as integrating agents.

5. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women emphasize the critical role of the media in advancing the status of women and their role in development and call for the elimination of exploitative and stereotyped portrayals of women in various forms of the media, including advertisements. 6/ The approach to women and the media taken in the Strategies was limited in its focus on the alternative media, publicly operated communication networks, and the adverse effects that advertising could have on attitudes towards and among women. Although the Strategies mentioned degrading images of women in articles and programmes disseminated worldwide, it was only in the first review and appraisal of its implementation, in 1990, that a link was established between the portrayal of violence against women in the media and violence against women in the family and society. It was recognized that the perpetuation in the mass media of stereotyped images, in particular the glorification of traditional male and female roles, delayed women's advancement by providing justification for an unequal status quo. In its resolution 1990/15, the Economic and Social Council insisted that Governments should, in conjunction with women's groups, take steps to reduce the stereotyping of women in the mass media, whether by self-policing on the part of the media or by other methods.

6. The second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, in 1995, examined the contribution of the media to women and development, emphasizing the achievements of the alternative media and women's contribution to the mainstream media. It found that the nexus of women, the media and development was finally being recognized as a central element of local, national and international action in research, policy-making, funding and other areas. 7/

7. Building on previous work and the Toronto Platform for Action, 8/ the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, went further when it considered "women and the media" as one of 12 critical areas of concern. The Beijing Platform for Action defines action under two strategic objectives:

(a) To increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication;

(b) To promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

It clearly identifies the various actors - Governments, national and international media systems, national machinery for the advancement of women, non-governmental organizations and media professional associations and the private sector - responsible for action in the field of women's full and equal participation in the media and women's access to and use of new media and in

combating stereotyping. The Beijing Platform takes a strong view of measures to combat stereotyping, including appropriate legislation against pornography and the projection of violence against women, and to develop professional guidelines and codes of conduct which should be consistent with freedom of expression. 9/ The present report focuses on the second strategic objective identified in the Platform for Action and discusses measures that can be used to achieve a more balanced, fairer portrayal of women and girls in their multiple roles in society and thus ultimately contribute to change in the portrayal of men and gender relationships.

I. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN RELATION TO WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

8. Any discussion about regulation of media content faces the need to provide for respect of the press and freedom of the press and of expression. The right to freedom of opinion and expression, which includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers, is contained in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To have the media free of State censorship and repression is acknowledged as a condition of a democratic society.

9. Freedom of the press and women's rights in terms of the media cannot be seen in isolation from one another. If women do not enjoy the same opportunities for access and expression as men, freedom of the press has not been achieved. Women journalists from developing countries have been claiming that there is a link between the suppression of women in the media and the attainment of media freedom as a whole. 10/ In certain countries women's increased participation and visibility in the media, which is a symbol of their growing involvement in the public sphere, has often made them targets of gender-specific violence, intolerance and even terrorism.

10. There is evidence that women journalists working in war zones have brought new insights to mainstream reporting about conflict. Women journalists reporting on the war in the former Yugoslavia, for example, contributed to the worldwide focus on the systematic rape of women in armed conflicts and its recognition as a crime of war.

II. CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE AND THE FUNCTIONING OF THE MEDIA AND THEIR EFFECTS ON WOMEN

11. The structure and the functioning of the media have undergone dramatic changes in the past two decades, at various levels. In many of the countries that previously had public, government-run and State-regulated broadcasting, the arrival of new electronic media that can easily transmit messages and programmes across national borders has left national Governments with very limited or no control. Market-based self-regulation and technological developments have made the old media order of regulatory measures, designed by Governments with the intention of ensuring diversity, fairness and the protection of minority interests, obsolete. Many countries have been confronted with a proliferation

of private broadcasting. In the print media, the call for democratization has led to radical changes and an increase in print products in some regions, such as the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

12. The information revolution continues to perpetuate many inequalities. If the global information and communication system has turned the world into a "global village", the majority of people around the world are not participating on an equal footing, neither as consumers or producers. The changes may have opened doors for women - in particular in access to information and employment in the media - but inequalities persist, and stereotyped representation has been carried to a global level. The increasing concentration of the media in the hands of a few transnational corporations with global reach which transmit images and print at a planetary scale has brought with it the export of cultural models and their codes, perceptions and prejudices, including gender, cultural and ethnic stereotypes. Info-entertainment images coming from a few developed countries are flooding the most remote areas of the globe. The process of commercialization has had an impact on programme content and quality, and communication forms have been radically changed. Old distinctions between information and entertainment, production and distribution are being eroded. These trends may have a considerable impact on the future of people living in the global village. 11/ Many developing countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean have raised concerns regarding the images and messages of the transnational networks which often stand in stark contrast to local values and norms and lack social reality and relevance. The public, however - in particular, women - often responds favourably to those images and messages.

A. The challenges of new technologies

13. The boom of new technologies is rapidly transforming traditional means of communication. Among the most important new technologies are computer networks, including visual and print media, which are opening new modalities of communication, permit interactive communication at the local or global level and provide access to distant sources of information. Owing to the relatively low costs of the basic infrastructure, computer networks are becoming increasingly accessible in certain developing countries. The disparity between regions and between urban and rural areas is increasing. 12/

14. The new networks have the potential to democratize information and communications, owing to their interactive and participatory nature, but questions about women's access and use of them have been raised by women's groups. Evidence suggests that fewer women than men master the new technologies; for example, women make up only about 10 per cent of Internet users in the United States. They have unequal access to computers at school and at home, and the computer environment, including its languages and operating systems, is often hostile to women. 13/ A number of consumer groups and particular interest groups have criticized the existence of sexually explicit material and the depiction of violence against women on the Internet.

15. During preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, women made increasing use of cyberspace. As was the case in other global conferences, the

United Nations and the community of non-governmental organizations created several spaces and on-line instruments for exchanges among women's organizations. In order to help disseminate information on the Conference, the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), established a World-Wide Web site for the Conference on the Internet. UNDP also established and coordinated an on-line conference prior to the Conference, with a Web site, and a gopher server set-up. There was a large demand for these services: 160,000 requests for information came from 68 different countries, in contrast to only 11,000 such requests during the Social Summit in Copenhagen only six months previously.

B. The media workforce

16. Many countries have seen a dramatic increase in women's employment in the media in the past two decades. In some countries, the proportion of women journalists has doubled since the 1970s. Women have become increasingly visible in the media, particularly on television. However, behind the scenes, they continue to face barriers in their careers and have access only to a limited number of jobs. Women's employment in the media is a matter not only of equal access but also of impact on output in terms of greater diversification of images and messages, definition of news content and emphasis and diversification in the portrayal of women and men.

17. The discrepancy between women and men in training and employment opportunities persists. In a survey of 70 countries, women represented more than 50 per cent of the communications students in two thirds of the countries. Yet they held less than half of the media jobs. Although they have become more visible, particularly in radio and television over the past decade, as presenters, announcers and reporters, they are underrepresented in production, creative and technical jobs and in top management posts where they could have an impact on programme content and help ensure a more comprehensive coverage of women's priority concerns. In Western European broadcasting organizations, for example, women are employed in only 5 per cent of the technical jobs but in up to 50 per cent of the administrative, low-level secretarial and junior management jobs. 13/

C. Alternative media

18. In the past decade, most regions have seen a steady growth in women's alternative media in all forms, with the print media experiencing the earliest and fastest increase in all regions. (The term "alternative" can stand for both alternative use of the media and outside the mainstream media.) Independent alternative media controlled by women include written press, video, film, radio broadcasting and, increasingly, the new communication technologies. Traditional communication tools such as street plays, songs and dance programmes continue to be used to create social and political awareness among women. Women have created and used alternative and communicative channels to support their efforts, defend their rights, diffuse their own forms of representation and question the dominant model of mainstream culture. Alternative productions by and for women within the mainstream media have also increased.

19. Women's associations and non-governmental organizations own radio stations, publishing houses, video and movie production studios. Radio broadcasting remains one of the cheapest and most widespread form of media communication in developing countries. Feminist International Radio Endeavour (FIRE), established in 1984, is one example of a successful feminist broadcasting initiative. Women's Feature Service (WFS), an independent press service on women, established in the mid-70s covers a multitude of news on and for women. Women's Television Network (WTN) in Canada was launched and awarded a speciality licence in 1994. With a workforce that is 98 per cent female, WTN has specialized in programmes that are of special interest to women. 14/

III. CHANGES IN THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

A. Progress and backlash in gender portrayal

20. Despite increased attention to the fair portrayal of women in the media, there are not many success stories to report. A variety of monitoring, enforcement and educational measures in many countries have brought some changes to the portrayal of women in the media. A few improvements can be observed in the increased numbers of female characters, female experts and news sources, and in the decreased segregation of women into traditional stereotyped roles. In many countries, the proliferation of media outlets in recent years has provided greater opportunity for productions, by, for and about women.

21. However, there has also been resistance and even a significant backlash. An analysis of sex roles and stereotypes indicates that women have been excluded or silenced in many media forms. Regular media monitoring in Canada and the United States of America shows relatively slow progress towards equal representation of women and men in the media. As part of a global monitoring exercise in 71 countries in January 1995, 15,500 stories were analysed; it was found that only 17 per cent of the people interviewed were women and only 11 per cent of the reports dealt with issues of special concern to women or contained any gender perspective. 11/

22. A key question is whether the media provide an accurate account of women's multiple roles in society. A second question is why does stereotyping persist despite two decades of research and action aimed at changing it? Final media output is shaped by professional norms and values, institutional structures and processes, perceptions of audience preferences and the demands of advertisers, which change slowly. Consequently, the portrayal of women and men in the media lags behind the reality of women's and men's actual lives and roles. The portrayal of women and men in the media mirrors socio-economic conditions which follow their own rules - in particular the rule of the market - but they are also an expression of political ideology. Images of women have been used as symbols of political aspirations and social change. 11/

23. The former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe provide an example of how stereotyped representation of women can be used as a vehicle for political ideology. There, the portrayal of women has gone from one extreme to the other: previous images of political and working women have been replaced, in the democratization process, by images of the fashion model, beauty queen and

mother. National versions of international glossy fashion and beauty magazines, previously non-existent, have conquered huge markets in only a few years. At the same time, there has been a surge in pornography. Pornographic publications reached their peak in 1991-1993, coinciding with complete freedom of the press. In Central and Eastern Europe, female images have been a profitable commodity in the new market economy. 15/

B. Commercials and advertisements

24. Advertising is one of the most influential institutions of socialization in modern society. Many studies confirm the persistence of highly stereotyped portrayals of women and gender relations in advertising. By design, messages transmitted through advertisements are usually based on thorough research of consumers' preferences and attitudes. Frequently, both the middle-of-the-road "clientele" approach addressing prevailing attitudes, and the avant-garde approach, projecting new images, can be offensive to those who find themselves represented in an unfair or stereotyped way. The need for monitoring and regulation of the images and language used by advertisers has been widely accepted in democratic societies. Many women perceive sexist stereotyping and the exploitation of women's bodies as insulting or degrading and complain that their concerns have not received enough attention by monitoring bodies which focus more on honesty, fairness and truthfulness than on gender portrayal. In many countries, consumers complain if they feel offended by a certain type of publicity. The number of complaints has increased in past years, in reaction to more aggressiveness in advertising, on one hand, and raised public concern and use of lobbying mechanisms, on the other.

25. Women represent an important market in today's commercial media environment. The 25-45 age group and especially professional and middle management women are the demographic groups whose purchasing power and influence is most sought. Advertisers traditionally reached them through women's magazines, but commercial TV channels with programmes targeting women have recently begun operation in the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and Latin America. The programmes feature advice, celebrity cults, tele-novelas and other entertainment programmes that reflect women in stereotyped roles.

C. Women in politics

26. As more women become active in politics, a fair and accurate portrayal of them in leadership positions has taken on particular relevance. The number of women in decision-making positions has steadily increased in the past years. In the twentieth century, 25 women have been elected heads of State or of Government, half of them since 1990, and more women are holding ministerial positions than ever before. In 1994, 9 per cent of parliamentarians and 5.6 per cent of cabinet ministers were women. Yet in the news, stories about influential women still focus on such exogenous factors as hairstyles and family situations. A recent study on the portrayal of women leaders in the media concluded that they are less visible than their male counterparts in the news. Although there seems to be little evidence that journalists employ simple sex stereotypes when covering new women leaders, it is undeniable that they

frequently give no credit to the women's credentials - their training and previous experience - but rather present them as outsiders who attained their status of power by chance, in an interim arrangement, or through family relations. When women leaders first rose to power, they were usually presented as agents of change whose appointment was a breakthrough for all women. Thus distinctive demands were put on them, which they had difficulty in fulfilling. 16/

D. Increase in the representation of violence, particularly sexual violence, against women

27. The representation in the media of violence against women, particularly sexual violence, has increased tremendously in past years. Television deregulation, combined with transborder satellite channels, has resulted in a 10-fold increase in televised pornography over the past decade in Europe. 17/ Many productions with explicit violent content including movies and television productions, and so-called "male sports", are taking up prime and major sending time and are targeting an exclusively male audience. An eight-country study on television violence in Asia conducted by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre classified 59 per cent of all the programmes studied as violent, with particularly high levels of violence found in India, Thailand and the Philippines. There has been a boom in sexually explicit material in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe. The production and marketing of this material has become an important business, with established links to forced prostitution and traffic in women, which is also increasing at an alarming rate and reaching global dimensions as a form of organized crime. Moreover, an increase in sexually explicit products on cyberspace has been reported, to which access is unrestricted and anonymous. 11/

28. The purported link between sexual exploitation and images of violence, including sexual violence, against women has frequently been debated. The issue of media effects is one of the most complex in communications research. Some psychological studies on the relationship between violence on the screen and violent impulses or behaviour in the viewers have found that exposure to scenes of gross violence makes people respond more violently in subsequent situations of aggression; others claim a cathartic effect.

29. One specific approach to the issue is to consider gender differences in reaction to violence on the screen. Women are less likely than men to watch violent programmes and films and are less likely to enjoy them if they do watch. They do not tolerate scenes of sexual violence against women. Whether they have themselves been the victims of violence or not, women have been found to become frightened by scenes of violence, with fear of rape being particularly common. Surveys and informal reports have found that women in all regions express high levels of anxiety about media violence. Women are especially concerned about the possible impact of violent messages on children. 18/

IV. MEASURES FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO THE MEDIA AND REMOVING STEREOTYPES

30. Steps to improve women's access to the media and to remove stereotypes in the portrayal of women can be promoted either from within existing media structures or from outside. Media responsibility can be achieved on a voluntary, self-regulating basis or through legal measures. The scope and the effectiveness of both approaches need to be scrutinized.

A. Changes from within the media

1. Codes of conduct and self-regulatory guidelines

31. An urgency to formulate ethical codes for the media with relation to the portrayal of women has been generally recognized. The Beijing Platform for Action requests the mass media and advertising organizations "to develop, consistent with freedom of expression, professional guidelines and codes of conduct and other forms of self-regulation to promote the presentation of non-stereotyped images of women" 19/ and "that address violent, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women ... ". 20/

32. Within media structures, several types of codes of conduct exist already. Similar to the codes of ethics of numerous press agencies, the broadcasting industry's self-regulation codes contain a set of voluntary rules designed to respond to the public's concerns. While these measures are introduced by the media institutions themselves, they are often developed as a result of external pressure. Where self-regulatory bodies such as press councils exist, individuals can use complaints procedures if they feel discriminated against by a message. Journalists' organizations have adopted codes of conduct or practice that define ethics in journalism. Some national journalists' organizations have developed guidelines on non-sexist reporting in an effort to make their members more aware of gender issues. 21/ Some media organizations have in-house policies and controls, such as the ombudsmen at the Times of India. 22/ In general, few media have self-regulatory guidelines or policies relating to the portrayal of women. A 1993 survey of broadcasting companies in 23 countries found that of 75 responding organizations, only 12 per cent had any written policy statements on the matter. 23/

33. So far, self-regulatory mechanisms in the media have not been shown to be particularly effective. A code of conduct would include the pledge not to reproduce denigrating stereotypes and images of women and gratuitous gender-based violence, encourage the media actively to promote, from a gender perspective, a more positive image of women's multiple roles in society, and contain provisions to involve more women in decision-making on orientation, programming and content, in order to guarantee the effective implementation of the code. 12/ Codes of conduct apply at various stages of media production and dissemination and often include ethical codes of conduct established by organizations of media professionals, media enterprises, press agencies or broadcasting industries. There can be overlapping and duplication. Many do not include sanctions or disciplinary procedures, because they do not establish monitoring bodies or mechanisms of enforcement. Voluntary codes of conduct may

be sacrificed if economic considerations and profit are perceived to be at stake.

2. Employment of women

34. The main obstacles to the employment of women in the media are similar to those obstacles in other fields: stereotyped attitudes by male colleagues, including sexual harassment; gender differences in values and priorities as regards professional topics; salary differences; lack of self-confidence and ambition; career structures and working conditions that do not allow reconciling work and family responsibilities. A variety of measures, which are not specific to the media sector, would help to overcome those obstacles: organizing and lobbying; mentoring; changing in policies and attitudes, including setting concrete goals and targets; improving recruitment and selection, training, career development and working conditions; monitoring employment patterns. 24/ Of considerable importance is attaining a critical mass of women professionals, since this is likely to ensure an impact on choices made about content.

3. Organizations and networks

35. At all levels, from the local to the regional and international, women communicators have established both women-only and mixed professional associations and networks to advocate their concerns and act on gender issues in the media. Many initiated their activities only in the 1990s as a result of the increased presence of women in the media and awareness of women's rights. By organizing, women working in the media have been able to increase awareness of women's issues and provide training and mutual support to one another in order to foster self-confidence. One particular role and duty of women's professional media associations is to advocate for training, better working conditions, improved chances for promotion, equal pay and social benefits such as maternity leave and child-care facilities.

4. Training

36. Although more women are entering schools of journalism and undertaking communication and documentation studies, programmes and curricula have not necessarily become gender-sensitive. Women represent more than 60 per cent of the students enrolled in third-level mass communications studies in developed countries, 60 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 50 per cent in Asia and the Pacific and more than 40 per cent in Africa. Curricula and training material on gender stereotyping need to be developed for academic and vocational training in mass communications and journalism. There is also need for in-house training and awareness-raising on gender stereotyping for those already employed in the media.

B. Changes from outside the media

1. Legislation and regulations

37. The influence of the State on the media, through regulation and legislation, has always been questioned in terms of its possible interference with the fundamental freedom of expression, even when such intervention in a democratic society is meant to ensure fair access and representation. When private broadcasters operate through public channels to which access is regulated, the State exercises control and has the authority to grant licences. For instance, in Australia, the Broadcasting Tribunal, the independent statutory authority established under the Broadcasting Act to regulate broadcasting, can grant, renew, suspend or revoke broadcasting licences and make programme standards for both radio and television. 25/

38. In the case of transboundary satellite transmission and computer media, the question of control becomes more problematic; it can only be achieved by prohibiting the means of access to, for instance, technical devices such as receptors or satellite dishes. Access to information can be denied on grounds of interference with national interests. But if this is done, article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which expresses the right to receive information through any media and regardless of frontiers, is violated.

39. Some countries have taken active measures to combat stereotyped portrayals of women through legislation and media guidelines or codes of ethics. Complaints procedures for customers have been established, or self-regulation by the broadcasting industry has been proposed. Some countries have defined regulations with regard to equal opportunities in employment in the media. In the United Kingdom, the Government considered that creating a climate in which more senior posts in broadcasting would be held by women was the most effective way of ensuring that women were represented fairly and sympathetically. The Broadcasting Act was considered consistent with that objective. 26/ In Belgium, the Flemish public service broadcasting organization launched a policy of equal opportunity in 1989 and established a positive action plan, including training, awareness-raising and career measures. 27/ The European Commission, through its Steering Committee for Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting, has launched a series of proposals with regard to training and career development, recruitment and working patterns for member States. 28/

40. The elimination of sexism from language is a basic tool for eliminating inequalities between women and men and discrimination against women. Language has a fundamental role in forming the social identity of an individual and mirrors ideas and perceptions. In 1990, the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on the elimination of sexism in language, in which it recognized the interaction that exists between language and social attitudes and the important role played by the media in shaping attitudes. It encouraged the use of non-sexist language in the media. 29/

41. The question of imposing regulations on sexually explicit material has raised debate in many countries. Regulation is widely accepted in the case of child pornography or if physical violence is involved. Such activities fall also within the scope of broader legislation relating to assault or the age of

consent. Many countries act strongly on child pornography offences, including production and possession. For example, in 1985 Norway revised its Penal Code to cover serious, brutalizing and denigrating pornography. 30/ A few countries, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, have taken new, stricter stands on television portrayal of violence against women. In New Zealand, the Government-appointed Committee of Inquiry into Pornography introduced legislation in 1992 that condemned violence and sexual violence against women and children. 31/ The use of regulations and the definition of "indecent" or "obscene" are strongly debated. Any strict regulation risks wiping out civil liberties and censorship can affect the freedom of speech of minority groups. The Canadian Supreme Court in a decision of February 1992 took a new course in its definition of obscenity. It recognized the harm to women, children and society arising from pornography as justified constraint on the free speech right of pornographers and concluded that the expression found in obscene material lay far from the core of the guarantee of free expression. 32/ Since sexual violence against women is a violation of women's human rights, the perspective is shifting away from the question of morality. The definition of violence against women in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life", provides a useful international legal instrument to be used in this respect. 33/

42. Ways to counteract images of sexual violence against women need further thought; legal action offers only one approach. Other measures would include public awareness campaigns, media education and specific action aimed at producers and consumers. Many women's media groups such as the Tanzania Media Women's Association and Women's Media Watch in Jamaica have already launched campaigns to address the problem. 34/

2. Independent monitoring and lobbying

43. As the media become more market-led, control by the State tends to diminish and more responsibility is given to the consumer. To benefit from this shift, independent media watch groups have been established in many countries. A prominent example is MediaWatch, a volunteer feminist organization in Canada which has played a fundamental role in reducing sexism in the media there. It focuses on specific action for media change such as using non-sexist and parallel language, depicting women and contemporary families realistically, ending the portrayal of women as sexual objects and offering media literacy training to empower audiences. MediaWatch monitors the media on a regular basis and presents its concerns at hearings of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

44. In another example, in order to counter offensive advertisements, the Instituto de la Mujer, a part of the Ministry for Social Affairs of Spain, has set up an "advertising observatory" with a free telephone line for women to use if they wish to complain that they find a particular advertisement offensive. Complaints are brought before a 15-member council which decides within 48 hours whether the advertisement should be withdrawn. If a two-thirds majority is in

favour, the advertiser is notified that unless the advertisement is withdrawn, legal action will follow. The Instituto de la Mujer has responded to accusations of censorship by underlining that its first priority is to work with advertisers on the reform of stereotypes. 35/

3. Media education

45. Media education includes education of the audience as well as the producers. The audience is understood to be an active social subject, capable of attaching significance to the messages and information received. In the United States a number of non-governmental organizations, including the National Telemedia Council Center for Media Education, offer workshops on the media.

46. In Latin America, one of the most systematic and wide-ranging initiatives in media education has been taken at the Centre for the Investigation of Cultural and Artistic Expression, in Chile, whose Education Programme for Active TV Viewing tries to inculcate a more critical grasp of televised messages and put pressure on broadcasters to rethink their messages. This approach has been applied in particular to tele-novelas, in a double educational effort: to make the audience aware of stereotypes, and to transmit critical comments to the producers. 36/

47. A first step in promoting critical awareness among producers of the subtle mechanisms of gender stereotyping in media content is monitoring; the second is education and training. A few countries undertake educational activity for the advertising industry. The Portrayal Department of the Netherlands Broadcasting Corporation provides audio-visual examples of gender stereotypes for producers. It also issues guidelines, hears complaints, monitors programmes, publishes reports and develops strategies to bring the issue of gender stereotypes to newsrooms. It involves the public in these activities. Its goal is to revise, enlarge and redefine journalistic news values. 37/

48. Beyond awareness campaigns, a systematic approach is needed to the development of curricula and training materials that highlight the nature and implications of gender stereotyping in media content.

4. Other incentives

49. In many countries, private and public interests have offered incentives such as awards to those who represent women fairly in the media. Women's film and video festivals are held all over the world to celebrate productions by women. In Canada, for example, there is the Women of the Year Award presented by Canadian Women in Communication, and other annual awards are given by MediaWatch. 14/ Swedish Television gives an annual Prix Egalia to the programme that best promotes equality between women and men. The most important prize on the European level is the European Commission's biennial Prix NIKI, for programmes that contribute to a better image of women in television, including children's programmes. Taking a different approach, women in media groups in German broadcasting select the most offensive programme for their prize Saure Gurke (sour cucumber).

C. Activities in the United Nations system

50. UNESCO's programme of communication activities for women has focused since its creation in 1981 on the portrayal of women in the media and women's participation in media work. While emphasizing the training of women in the communications professions and the promotion of women to higher-level posts, attention has also been given to assisting women's alternative media information networks and regional and national professional associations, establishing databases, and supporting women's groups and non-governmental organizations concerned with women and the media and promoting media education. An evaluation of the programme for the decade 1981-1990 acknowledged its achievements in operational terms but criticized the lack of research and analysis and a weakness in publicizing material that it had produced. 38/ In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, UNESCO organized an international symposium entitled Women and the Media: Access to Expression and Decision-making. It was the culmination of seven regional preparatory workshops held during 1994. The Toronto Platform for Action, an outgrowth of the Symposium and UNESCO's major contribution to the Fourth World Conference, contains detailed proposals on the elimination of stereotypes and on women's employment in the media, women's media networks and media training. It urged professional media organizations to address the needs of women journalists. It also asked media enterprises to develop guidelines on gender portrayal in cooperation with organizations of journalists and media professionals. 8/

51. The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) started its programme on women and communications in 1988 when it organized the International Consultative Meeting on Communications for Women and Development. In 1991, the Institute carried out a project involving Argentina, Colombia and the Dominican Republic on the development of communication material for women and development. INSTRAW has prepared a media handbook to assist people working in media programming and decision-making to become more aware of gender bias in the use of language and images. 39/

52. With regard to the linkage between media and violence, the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders underlined the important role that the media play in crime prevention. A workshop on the mass media and crime prevention issues examined the use of regulations and enforcement to control violence in the media, including violence against women, and its effectiveness. In its recommendations, it urged the United Nations to help the media encourage the development of appropriate measures and mechanisms which would contribute to the eradication of violence against women while reasserting the importance of a free press as part of the democratic process. 40/

V. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

53. The following questions arising from consideration of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the area of women and the media are worthy of further consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fortieth session:

(a) Should the Government, through national machinery for the advancement of women and other mechanisms and in collaboration with the mass media, assist in defining codes of conduct by, for instance, providing detailed proposals?

(b) What goals should be expressed in such codes of conduct for the media: to avoid sexism in language, not to reproduce denigrating stereotypes and images of women and gratuitous gender-based violence, to promote a more positive image of women's multiple roles in society, to involve more women in decision-making on the orientation, programming and content of the media?

(c) What kind of enforcement mechanisms should be created to guarantee the effective implementation of such codes?

(d) How should special attention be given to ways of reducing or eliminating the representation of violence against women in line with the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women?

(e) How can media education be used to educate the audience as well as the producers, particularly in raising an awareness of violence against women?

(f) How can organizing and networking on the part of women producers and journalists be encouraged and facilitated?

(g) How can the outreach of media monitoring groups, including advertisement monitoring groups, be improved and the enforcement of complaint procedures undertaken?

(h) How can communication training be made more gender-sensitive and on-the-job and in-house-training in all forms of the media be improved?

(i) How can public access to computer networks and to facilities for training women in the new communication technologies be best provided or improved in countries and areas with meagre access?

(j) What are the specific roles and responsibilities of the international community in the area of women and the media?

Notes

1/ "Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995" (A/CONF.177/20), chap. I, sect. 1.J, para. 234.

2/ Ibid., para. 236.

3/ Ibid., para. 243 (a).

4/ Ibid., para. 243 (c).

5/ "Influence of the mass communication media on attitudes towards the roles of women and men in present-day society" (A/CONF.94/BP.19).

6/ Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), paras. 206-208, 366-372.

7/ "Second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" (E/CN.6/1995/3/Add.8).

8/ Adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Symposium on Women and the Media: Access to Expression and Decision-making, held at Toronto (Canada), 28 February-3 March 1995.

9/ "Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women ..." (A/CONF.177/20), chap. I, sect. 1.J.

10/ Gwen Lister, "Freedom of press and the role of women journalists in leadership positions in Africa", unpublished paper prepared for the Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Secretariat, 1995.

11/ Margaret Gallagher, "Lipstick imperialism and the new world order: women and media at the close of the twentieth century", unpublished paper, prepared for the Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Secretariat, December 1995.

12/ Sally Burch, "Women and the media in the era of new communications technologies", unpublished paper prepared for the Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Secretariat, October 1995.

13/ Margaret Gallagher, An Unfinished Story: Gender Patterns in Media Employment, UNESCO Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 110 (Paris, 1995).

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18/ Margaret Gallagher, "Critical perspectives on the responsibility of the media vis-à-vis the notion of equality between the sexes", paper presented at a seminar of the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Mass Media, entitled Human Rights and Gender: the Responsibility of the Media, held at Strasbourg, 29 June-1 July 1994.

19/ "Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women ..." (A/CONF.177/20), chap. I, sect. I.J, para. 245 (a).

20/ Ibid., para. 245 (b).

21/ Bettina Peters, "Value and limits of a self-regulatory approach to gender equality in the media", paper presented at the UNESCO International Symposium on Women and the Media: Access to Expression and Decision-Making, held at Toronto (Canada), 28 February-3 March 1995.

22/ Vijayalakshmi Balakrishnan, "Indigenous social norms and women in Asian media", in Women's Tribune Center, Women Empowering Communication, Margaret Gallagher and Lilia Quindoza-Santiago, eds. (New York, 1994).

23/ Margaret Gallagher "Women and media, 1985-1994: a decade of development?", paper presented at the Preparatory Conference of the member States of the European Union for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Toledo, 14-16 April 1994.

24/ Gallagher, An Unfinished Story ..., p. 53.

25/ Second periodic report of Australia (CEDAW/C/AUL/2).

26/ National report submitted by the United Kingdom to the Division for the Advancement of Women in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, p. 92.

27/ National report submitted by Belgium to the Division for the Advancement of Women in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, p. 19.

28/ European Commission, Steering Committee for Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting, "Recommendations for the promotion of equal opportunities, 1986-1991" (V/1356/94-EN).

29/ Council of Europe, Recommendation R(90)4: The elimination of sexism from language.

30/ National report submitted by Norway to the Division for the Advancement of Women in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, p. 114.

31/ See "Sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography: Note by the Secretary-General" (A/50/456).

32/ Susan M. Easton, The Problem of Pornography: Regulation and the Right to Free Speech (London/New York, Routledge, 1994).

33/ General Assembly resolution 48/104.

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